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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Political Situation In Nigeria

When General Obasanjo's regime formally hands over power on 1 October, Nigeria will again face the uncertainties of civilian government after 13 years of military rule. President-elect Shehu Shagari, standard bearer of the conservative, northern-Muslim oriented National Party, is expected to maintain the basic tenets of Nigeria's nonaligned foreign policy and its mixed economy. ☐

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Shagari is a 55-year old Muslim Fulani tribesman with extensive parliamentary and ministerial experience. He has a reputation for honesty, moderation, and administrative abilities. His pragmatism and consensus approach to government could make him a relatively non-controversial president, which many Nigerian observers believe is just the kind of leader Nigeria needs to launch its Second Republic. On the other hand, Shagari may not prove a forceful enough leader to keep Nigeria's centrifugal forces under control. Shagari's main image defect is that he is widely perceived to be a weak man, which reflects his lack of charisma, quiet and unassuming demeanor, and wooden speaking style. Moreover, he is not in charge of his party but is beholden to its collective senior leadership which expects to dominate policy making. ☐

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Although his party proved to have the broadest multi-ethnic base, Shagari's margin of victory was slim and is being legally contested by opposition candidates. He lacks a governing majority in the federal legislature, where none of Nigeria's three major ethnic groups predominate, which will require coalition building and may force a more cooperative effort to make civilian rule work. Shagari's capacity to govern also depends on the continued ability of the National Party--an often uneasy alliance of rival political barons--to pull together. ☐

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The National Party has a pro-business bias in that it represents nationally much of the country's commercial elite and Shagari himself has many business interests and once served as finance minister. The party's manifesto gives first priority to revitalizing agriculture along with development of industry and greater incentives to foreign investment and domestic private enterprise as the

Confidential

approach to improve the lot of the mass of impoverished Nigerians. The Shagari government probably would continue a fairly aggressive oil policy regarding pricing and government participation, but be less inclined to use oil as a political weapon. ☐

The new civilian government will be under strong pressure to outperform its military predecessor. Its survival will depend on its ability to cope with traditional ethnic and religious divisions, to manage the economy and to deal with financial problems, and to cultivate its relationship with the army whose lower ranks are not enthusiastic about civilian rule. Civilians, prone to confrontational politics, could easily fall victim to a rising tide of popular social and economic demands created by rapid and uneven development, urban growth and crime, rising expectations, and continued inflation. Many Nigerians assume that a civilian government inevitably will breakdown after two years or so and be replaced by a new generation of more nationalistic and forceful military leaders. If the Nigerian experiment succeeds reasonably well, it could influence other African states to move toward restoration of civilian rule. If it fails badly, Nigerians are unlikely to try a democratic system again for a long time. ☐

Foreign policy under Shagari will continue to reflect the goals of fostering majority rule in southern Africa, playing a leadership role on the continent, opposing foreign intervention in Africa, and promoting the interests of African and other less developed countries in international forums. Because the Shagari government is likely to be preoccupied with domestic issues and stability at least initially, its foreign policy may be somewhat more conservative, less activist, and more dependent on closer economic cooperation with the West. ☐

The return to constitutional rule may affect to some degree the government's ability to act in the foreign policy area, and it could find it more difficult to support Western initiatives that are in Nigeria's broad interests. The divisive forces in Nigerian society will be more manifest, certain presidential actions will require legislative approval, and the government will have to contend with a more outspoken press and other interest groups. ☐

The improved climate of Nigerian-US relations is likely to continue, but the overall closeness of relations will ~~remain~~ be heavily dependent on Nigerian perceptions of the sincerity of US policy toward southern Africa. Any faltering of US commitment could revive residual resentment rooted in what is remembered as US hostility toward federal Nigeria during the 1967-70 civil war. The National Party displays generally friendly attitudes toward the US, has voiced positions on several international issues favorable to US interests, and seriously wants more US investment and technology. ☐